To be a pilgrim is to undertake a journey with a spiritual purpose.

https://cov100.org/coventry-pilgrimage-2018

I felt that my spiritual purpose was to represent our little parish of Burton Hastings with Stretton Baskerville where I live. Part of the Coventry Diocese, but on the edge. No, not in the south, as some people guessed (Burton Dassett; Leamington Hastings?)

We border Leicestershire so are one of the most northerly parishes in Coventry Diocese. On the edge... we are in Rugby borough, yet in Nuneaton Deanery. We used to be part of the Wolvey group, and in recent years have joined Bulkington so we share their vicar in plurality. But we’re easily accessible, being just off the M69/A5 Watling Street junction (now called Stretton Baskerville roundabout). Not far from the Fosse Way either. In the past I’ve found it quicker to drive from the northern edge of Coventry to home than into the centre of Coventry.

When I started the Coventry Diocese Centenary Pilgrimage I hoped that I would be able to complete all of the stages, but with quiet hope. Sometimes family occasions, both happy and sad, can overtake intentions. My husband and I are in the middle; my parents-in-law are getting more infirm; my father-in-law has Parkinson’s. Our daughter and her husband and our grand-daughter then aged 2 meant that some things could not be predicted. But each 4th Saturday from March, I was able to make it.

I was reassured that I would be able to find a lift so I parked at one end in hope... and was always rewarded.

These thoughts that follow are about each stage of the walk but are by no means a step by step walk through! I’m looking at these themes that occurred... the walking conditions; the hospitality; the conversations; the prayers and Litany; the seasons; back at home.

March

St Laurence, Meriden to Burton Green Village Hall, (Westwood Church) via St John, Berkswell

The choice for hospitality was relatively easy... it was Easter Eve so we had Hot Cross Buns! But I will always remember the walking conditions. We had no alternative but to cross field boundaries in muddy water. There were many of us too. An extra challenge. Those at the front paved the way for those walking later.

Back at home, workmen were working on the church roof to replace the stolen lead with stainless steel. A member of our congregation had a house flood and could no longer live there so our Pilgrims’ troubles were minor.

The day after writing this, my son-in-law was admitted to hospital, so I went to support my daughter and my nursery-aged grand-daughter, living in Hertfordshire. Glad to report that they’ve made a diagnosis and it’s treatable.
April

**Burton Green to St Mary Stoneleigh**

This was varied in terrain and in surroundings - on the outskirts of Kenilworth, beside a railway line, through a golf course and into rural surroundings. Many details on signs and many different signs, including a space invader! St Mary’s was the first of many churches that featured animals - here, a mouse on the font.

Back at home: after a year’s temporary appointment as Curate in Charge of St Botolph’s Church Burton Hastings and St James Church Bulkington, Rev Liz is moving on, to University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire to join the chaplaincy team there.
May

*St Mary Stoneleigh to via St Giles Bubbenhall to St Leonard Ryton*

Such a contrast this time between the rural setting and near the end, close to the old Ryton car works. Then to Ryton, split by the A45 but safely through the underpass.

Back at home: a local farmer died suddenly and his funeral was held at St Botolph’s in May. His funeral was well attended by the local community. He will be remembered by many who knew him as being a very generous farmer and always ready to help people when they were in need.

June

*St Leonard Ryton via St Margaret Wolston to St John the Baptist Brinklow*

Hot day but pleasant breezes and several parts through woodland. Beautiful sights including a field of poppies.

Difficult to believe that the centre of Coventry was less than 10 miles away.

Back at home: our application for a grant was unsuccessful, despite their wanting more information from us, which we gave. The Faculty for an extension has been prolonged.
Parishioners did an NCD survey and the results were given to the PCC early in June. We’ll give them to the new incumbent. The Parish Profile has been completed and the advert for the next Vicar of Bulkington in plurality with Burton Hastings has been posted.

July

St John the Baptist Brinklow to St James Ansty

One of the walkers had sight problems and we unofficially took turns to guide him along narrow patches, through stiles and around brambles. Personal memories flooded back of working with disabled people and especially a blind student who knew the campus so well that on one occasion she decided to guide me instead! One thing that I learnt was to sharpen up my left from my right. When someone trusted me to say the correct direction it made me really focus! Especially as in a later walk, we were walking close to a canal.

This month we went through a corn field and it was as high as an elephant’s eye!

Even the walk leaders who had walked a short time before were surprised at the change, I think. Plus we were able to have a snack on the way... the blackberries were out!

Back at home: Interviews took place for the new incumbent. Finding it difficult to keep good news quiet. But not impossible. Community Space for Burton Hastings, a project nominated by Burton Hastings PCC, had been accepted by Tesco’s Bags of Help Scheme. That’s great.

August

St James Ansty to All Saints Bedworth

Nearer home territory - especially by car on the return journey to Ansty. There was a view of Coventry from Ansty churchyard - not too far away! Good to hear that Bedworth too have a new incumbent. Part of the walk took us
alongside the end of the M69 and what astonished me was a pear tree in full fruit alongside the field boundary. How had it been there? Had there been a house there, now uprooted by the motorway? Or might someone have just thrown a pear out of the car and one of its seeds started to grow?

A gradual entry from rural to urban to Bedworth; via Miners’ Welfare Park and then we arrived in the town centre, passed the library and the police station to All Saints.

Back at home: applied to a Trust Fund that had sent the PCC a request to apply for funds. Optimistic.

September

All Saints Bedworth to St Mary and All Saints Fillongley

At last I’m able to talk about the new incumbent and realise that some of my fellow pilgrims know him! And I’m not surprised too. Great to be able to share good news.

Managed to find one person from Coventry Cathedral to whom I offered “Happy Michaelmas”.

As we’ve been walking we have talked about many things - some people used to work at GEC/GPT/Marconi like my husband did and I found that we had common acquaintances. I found that I was able to move and talk to others as the journeys proceeded. There were points to move on such as roads to cross, stiles to negotiate and places where others and I stopped to take photos and, just occasionally to put on rain gear. Talked about families, home towns (many weren’t Coventry kids), our respective churches.

This time talked about another walk that I’d completed earlier this month; the National Forest Way. I’d started it with my old school friend in 2014 and planned to do several stretches once a year to its end in 2018 as a WW1 Centenary tribute. When we walk together she has the guide book and I carry the map and between us we manage to find our way. It is so fitting that that walk finished at the National Arboretum. Doing the Diocesan Pilgrimage Walk I was happy to be led so didn’t take any map with me. I found it a luxury!

The seasons have now changed - we passed a corn field that had been cut.
October

St Mary and All Saints Fillongley to All Saints Allesley

I was able to share stories about Harvest Festival with fellow pilgrims. This year’s was tinged with sadness as we had lost a regular attender at the Auction of Goods. Our annual Auction, taking place the day after the Harvest Festival, was presided over by a cattle auctioneer and always brought in good support from the villagers.

John Bunyan mentioned the weather in To be a Pilgrim - this time I had to defrost the car before setting off! It was warmer inside church now. Previous occasions when it was much warmer outside, it was refreshingly cool in church. What a wonderful country to live in, where we have the luxury of four seasons. Giants would have found it easier to negotiate some of the stiles we encountered, especially one this month.

I don’t know how, but I believe we will get our facilities at St Botolph’s. I’ve been encouraged when listening to people from other parishes and hearing their stories. And of course receiving the wonderful hospitality at the churches visited during the Pilgrimage.

Back at home: I heard the day before that the Trust Fund had rejected my application for funding. Sad as they had sent me a letter requesting us to apply. I’ve since applied to another source. I was able to share that we had received a legacy from a Parishioner who had lived all her life in the village and had died in her 90’s. Less than £20K to go...

A busy November

It was great to meet some walkers again at the Diocesan Conference in November. I enjoyed the Choral Evensong the following week for the Commissioning of the Parish Partners. It’s sad to see their numbers dwindling, especially in the Diocesan Centenary. I’m looking forward to doing the final stretch of the Pilgrimage and to saying the Litany of Reconciliation at its home - although we have made many more homes for the Litany on our journeys. I also enjoyed sharing the Cairn. It gave me fond memories of Offa House. It’s great to meet fellow pilgrims and to visit places that I haven’t seen before.

Back at home: looking forward to the Installation of the new Vicar on the 28th.

Anne Dickinson, November 2018

Who would true valour see,
   Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
   Come wind, come weather.
There’s no discouragement
   Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
   To be a pilgrim.
   John Bunyan

Tweets and pix

There’s more, in short phrases and photos, here: https://sites.google.com/view/coventrypilgrimage2018/home